4: Hansen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11
Turkey MB1

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He writes[36]: "As an excuse for the ban [of the wearing of veil and over-garments] the reformers stated that dangerous criminals and adherents of l'ancien régime all too easily could hide themselves under the long, armless "feradje", the black "carshaf", and the flimsy "yashmak", transparent only from inside, which naturally afforded the best security against search, and it is an undoubted fact that many a spy and criminal has concealed himself under this woman's dress, that veils and hides all forms". Rygaard likewise stresses[37] that "... the so-called emancipation of the Turkish woman is regarded with some justification by many Turks as being an abandonment of a natural protection, and that the Turkish desire to guard his women strictly in the home must be viewed as a symptom of modesty and not be credited to the very widespread, but erroneous, impression that he jealously wishes to hide strictly private mistresses in his harem under the most humiliating conditions".

Should one wish to learn about conditions in these Turkish harems prior to Kemal Atatürk's day, one can hardly do better than to apply to the women themselves. We have an account of conditions under the Sultanate just before the first World War, written by an Arab Sherifa, Musbah Haidar. As daughter of a brother of the Sherif of Mecca, who dwelt in a castle on the Asiatic side of the Bosporus, as the "guest" of the Sultan of Turkey, and with an English mother, she gives in her memoirs (published 1948) a woman's assessment of life in an Arab-Turkish upper-class home. Musbah Haidar[38] speaks about: "... those well-guarded, exclusive and dignified homes—*the harems*". Regarding the beginnings of the transformation of the Oriental women's life in Turkey to a Western pattern, she writes: "With the rapid decline of old courtesies, breeding and old customs, all that the women got in their place was the doubtful liberty of being able to go out when and where they liked, instead of being guarded and protected as they always have been, always attended and back in their homes by sunset". Incidentally, she strongly denounces the descriptions that have appeared in book form or in articles that purport to provide an authentic picture of the life of a Muslim woman in Turkey. "... In all the years which Musbah spent in Turkey, never did she see Europeans being either allowed or accepted into the Imperial circle, or those of other great houses. Great Eastern ladies were not in the habit of receiving inquisitive and curious foreigners. If occasionally an Ambassador's wife or that of a Consul-General was permitted to visit the Harem, it was done most ceremoniously, and no lady present ever relaxed her polite and formal hospitality into intimate friendship. So these so-called intrepid travellers and globetrotting journalists could only pick up their impressions and ideas from some ninth-rate Levantine, or from some self-styled and much advertised "Hanoum"[39].

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It was symptomatic that in Iraqi Kurdistan it was among the young men[40] and not among the women that I met a definite wish for a change of existing conditions. It was among the young men who had studied at the University of Beirut, or who had been trained in Europe or America, that one heard talk of, as an ideal for the future, "an educated wife" and monogamy. The right people in the West are most inclined to envy, the Coran's sanction of polygamy, was apparently not a right they wished to avail themselves of in the future. From what I saw of the man's position in the home, particularly within the uneducated urban feminine milieu, it was understandable that a man could

4: Haneen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

dream of not having to face a united women's front of, say, mother, wives (usually chosen by the women of his family), plus sisters, daughters half and fully grown, who ordered his life from start to finish. In an "educated wife" he hoped to obtain compensation for the social and emotional contact he was now forced to seek during the hours of day with other men.

This leads us to a discussion of the Islamic, and thus the Kurdish woman's marital position and the marriages arranged by the family. As already mentioned, the choice of a young man's married partner is practically always left to the women of his family, that is to say the mother or step-mother and sisters, whereafter the matter is laid before the father for approval. In regard to the fact that married couples in many cases have never seen each other before the marriage is to be consummated, the general Western idea is that it must be difficult for a young girl to be given to an unknown man. However, it must be equally trying for the young man. This is also pointed to by Granqvist when she says[41]: "In what concerns a woman's lack of freedom in her marriage the same thing holds good to a great extent of the young man".

It was characteristic that the brother of Sheikh Taifûr in Topzawa, who was thinking of going to Europe, asked me if it really was true that one could walk up to any woman in the street and offer her marriage. That was his first impression of liberty of choice in Europe. He had never envisaged any sentimental basis for marriage.

The young woman is thus selected by the women with whom she will have to live and work, as the young couple usually dwells in the bridegroom's home. She must beforehand feel highly-prized by the bride price paid out on the contraction of marriage, which is expended to a greater or lesser degree on the luxury with which she is to be surrounded. In most cases she knows the women who are to be her daily companions and fellow-workers. From her own home she is well trained in the domestic work that can be expected of her. She has been brought up with the quite natural idea that her most important destiny and greatest happiness is to be allowed to bear children. From the years spent in the home among other women she has heard and witnessed everything worth knowing about the difficulties of matrimonial relations. She is not expected to be her husband's comrade on a spiritual or intellectual level. The basis for the joint family idea, with several generations housed within the the same building is a married life of a different nature, less organised than in our culture pattern. During the day the husband, even among the village aristocracy, has little opportunity of companionship with his wife, as the great boundary between the form of life of men and women compelled him to seek the society of other men, whilst on her side the woman enters the feminine half of the community. On entering marriage, a young woman, in addition to her own personal qualities, is regarded as a representative of a whole family, with which it has been felt desirable to become allied. She arrives in an aura of her own family's glory. She herself had no personal expectations beyond the advantages to be derived from the married state and the fulfilment of a woman's natural desire to have children. As young people in good families had not seen each other before marriage, it was obvious that no sentimental basis existed on which to start the union, but this did not mean that later on a high degree of sympathy might not develop between husband and wife and that this was quite

4: Wilson G-3 (no date) 1937 MHI Iraq MHI
Kurd MAP

I K 438 439 173 782 539

now a flourishing market for the surrounding country and for trade with Turkey. It has one feature of great interest: an ancient bridge of Roman design, known locally as "Alexander's bridge," though unlikely to be in any way connected with the great conqueror. Tradition at Zakho has, however, another tale of the construction of the bridge. It is said to have been built by a celebrated local governor, who found that the keystone would not remain in place. He summoned a soothsayer, who proclaimed that it would never stand until a life had been built into the arch. The governor accepted the verdict and with his councillors, who were sworn to secrecy, decided that the first living thing to follow them on to the bridge the next morning would provide the necessary victim. They waited for some hours, but no one came. Then the governor's little daughter wondered why her father was so long away and taking her pet dog she set off to look for him. Her father was at first terrified when he saw her coming, but was relieved when he noticed that her dog was running in front of her. Alas, she thought it unfitting for the dog to approach her father before she did and so she called it and stepped on to the bridge. Public opinion compelled the governor to carry out the sacrifice and the girl was built into the centre of the arch and the keystone held and has gone on holding for hundreds of years.

I K 653 185

The development of Kurdistan has naturally not been popular with all the Kurds, and I remember an interesting incident. During the construction of the Amadia road, an elderly Agha stood for a while sadly watching the blasting of a pulpit of overhanging rock. When echoes of the explosion had died and the last fragments of stone had fallen into the rocky gorge below, he turned sorrowfully away. "The old days, the old days," he lamented. "Many is the time I lay behind that rock with my rifle and held up caravans for safe-conduct money."

I K 721 361

The town of Amadia, which, like Edinburgh Castle, is situated on a rocky plateau at a height of 4,100 feet, sixteen feet higher than Cairn Gorm, is now easily accessible by road. The town was formerly ruled by semi-independent Pashas who admitted a nominal suzerainty to the Turkish authorities. It has a stormy history, and the minaret of the mosque is pitted with bullet holes. These are souvenirs of 1925, when the Barzan Kurds, in alliance with some of the descendants of the old rulers of Amadia, attacked the town and succeeded in surrounding the Mosuli qaimaqam and a handful of police in the Government serai. The stout-hearted garrison held out until they were rescued by a body of Assyrians under the Assyrian bishop, Mar Semis, a jovial Friar Tuck of the Nestorian Church.

19